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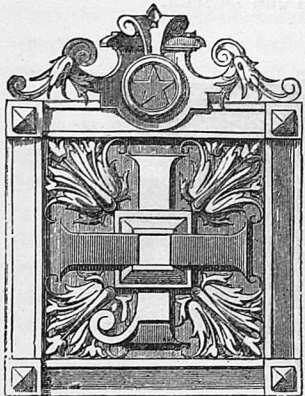
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DECORATION & FURNITURE

BAD TASTE IN UPHOLSTERY.



IN one of his valuable essays on decoration, Mr. Lewis F. Day complains that the decorator is accustomed to place too much dependence upon upholstery for his effect. He says: It is only natural, however unfortunate, that the lady of the house should resort to the expedient of trimmings, fringes, valances, and the like — she knows

nothing of decoration, and something about millinery, and in every difficulty she faces back accordingly upon feminine devices. There is no such excuse for the decorator. His is a manly art, and remains for the most part in the hands of men. Why he should treat it in a womanish fashion is hard to understand, except that he has come at last to look at things from the woman's point of view.

Whatever the cause, it is a great pity that the professional ideal of decoration should be so flimsy. Interior decoration is properly but a continuation of the scheme of the architect; and even if the architect had no scheme, it would be the business of the decorator to find one that was not out of keeping with architectural dignity. It is always and everywhere the expedient of the inexpert and of the ignorant to trust to something which shall cover shortcomings and faults. The unskilful joiner depends upon polish and paint to hide his clumsiness; and always the inexpert designer trusts to flourishes to qualify the feebleness of the forms of his invention.

It is not perhaps wholly the fault of the tradesman if, in the desire to meet the public craze for cheapness, he resorts to the use of a material which does not exact that quality of workmanship which must always be more or less costly. It is so easy to glue up a piece of rough carpentering and cover it with plush, and it has such a picturesque and pleasant effect when done, that we cannot be surprised if we are threatened with a fashion of furniture which suggests the delicately masked prison of a lunatic, where everything is padded and made soft for fear he might dash out his brains against it. There is no denying the beauty of plush, and no desire to deny its effectiveness, even where entire dependence is placed upon it for effect; but the practice of covering furniture with it entirely, even to the legs of tables, which are cased in close-fitting trousers of the same, buttoned, so to speak, with gilt nails, is not to be encouraged. It is admirably adapted to one purpose only, and that one to which it is not applied, namely, occasional decoration. By this is meant not little chairs and tables that are of no use and that are as well out of the way, but the temporary embellishment of a room or hall which ordinarily serves some everyday purpose with which rich decoration would be inconsistent. If on occasion of some grand entertainment—suppose in celebration of a coming-of-age—it were thought fit to metamorphose the servants' hall into a reception-room, it would not be difficult at very short notice, by the aid of carpentry and plush velvet, to give it an air of absolute sumptuousness. On the other hand, a drawing-room of this character is

more appropriate to ladies of the class that are accustomed to change their quarters with their protector, than to matrons who attach some idea of dignity, if not of sanctity, to their homes.

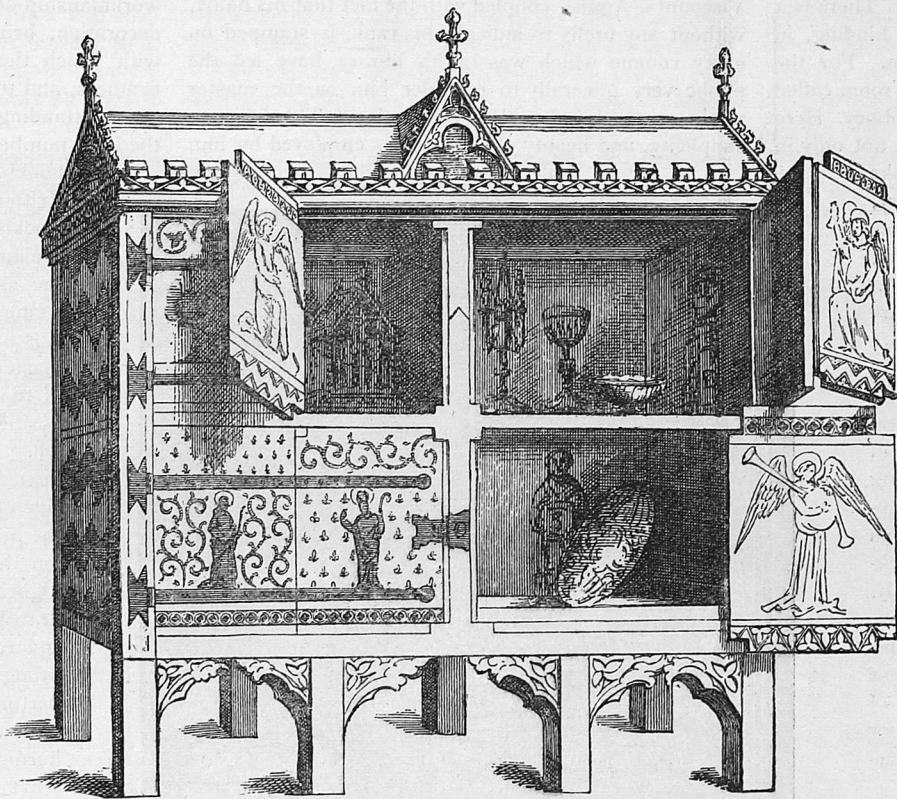
We have long since been accustomed to chairs and sofas padded out of all shape, and it will be some time before folks are persuaded that the most comfortable settees are not necessarily those in which least woodwork is apparent; but it was reserved for a generation who imagine they are advanced in taste to cover the naked wood with stuff even where there is no excuse of comfort. The abuse of plush and velvet generally is the more to be regretted that it is in itself so beautiful, and in its place so useful in decoration. There is the dreadful device of planting little mirrors in a block of plush-covered wood, with a view to "setting off" the mirror. And so it does "set it off," as the velvet cases set off the wares of the jeweler. But the mirror is not exposed on the walls of a drawing-room for sale, and it is certainly not of sufficient interest to have attention called to it in particular. The jeweler very naturally desires to show his trinkets off to advantage. The furnisher has to think of the room, and of its general

is incongruous with the idea of such a trimming, and certainly to abstain from all such wooden absurdities as are called fringe. Tassels of wood are no less absurd. It is in curtain valances that these things run wildest. And there has been some consequent reaction of taste against valances altogether. But the abuse of them is no argument for their abolishment, so long as reform is possible. It is, no doubt, a very good plan to hang curtains from a plain brass pole; but there are objections to that practice, as well as prejudices against it; and there is no reason why we should not have valances, so long as we have them in good taste. As a rule, the simpler the valance the better it will be. If half the money wasted on heavy upholstery were spent in bold embroidery, the valance might be changed from a most tasteless to a most tasteful feature in a room.

As to the right use of stuff as a wall-covering, that resolves itself very much into a question of cost and cleanliness. That the effect of silk damask as a wall-covering is more beautiful than that of printed paper is not to be denied. But then the expense of it is proportionately greater, and, except in the country, the silk would last no longer in a state of decent cleanliness than paper. The use of chintz for bedroom walls is more within the means of most men, and it is a capital plan so to cover the walls, so long as the chintz does not go down too near the skirting; a dado of wood, paint, matting, or whatever it may be, is necessary in such a case. Walls are sometimes covered with contrasting stuffs, the filling of one material, the dado of another; but there could not be a more ill-advised proceeding. If you have stuff on part of the wall there is all the more need for sterner decoration on the other; and no more inappropriate position could be chosen for a textile fabric than the dado of a room. It is better that a dado should consist of something that can be washed.

Another common practice not to be upheld is the use of velvet and the like for the panels of furniture. The stuffed panel of a chair is all very well, and so are all padded panels against which you may be supposed to lean; but the introduction of stamped velvet, in the form of door panels or the covering of a cabinet, has nothing whatever to recommend it but its color and cheapness. But these are far from excusing it. In all furniture panels

one feels that wood is what is most appropriate. What might not be done in inlay, or even in flat carving, without very great expense? Even in painted panels one likes the wood to appear. Tiles do not form the most suitable panels for furniture; but, at least, they suggest that they can be cleaned with the furniture in which they are framed.



ARMOIRE IN ARCHITECTURAL STYLE.

IN THE CATHEDRAL OF NOYON.

effect as a background to its occupants. Those little mirrors, isolated from their surroundings, shout at the beholder, "Come, look at me!" It is tolerably obvious that the device best suited to the display of what is for sale is not best calculated to secure the repose so essential to domestic decoration.

With regard to trimmings generally, we have a great deal too much of them. There are few rooms that would not have been the better for a little less ornament (?) and a little more thought and judgment in its selection and distribution. But then, of course, it is easier to put pattern upon pattern, than to select between them; easier to tack on gimp than to know just where gimp is wanted. As to fringe in particular, it has been argued that because fringe is in its origin only the frayed ends of the stuff, knotted together to prevent further fraying, therefore all fringe should be a part of the material to which it serves as a finish. But there is a mean between this somewhat pedantic application of first principles, and the monstrous fringes, so-called, to which we have been accustomed. The reasonable practice would seem to be to keep always in view the origin in fringe; so avoiding any use of it that

ARCHITECTURAL CABINET-WORK.

THE cabinet-maker of the Middle Ages understood better than his successor of the Renaissance how far it was safe to borrow from the resources of the architect. There is no objection to the furniture maker adapting to his craft the principles of the latter; indeed in the matter of construction, it is proper that he should do so. Let him be careful, however, that he does not transcend the limits of propriety in this regard. He should remember that much that is imposing and beautiful in the materials employed by the architect on the grand scale necessary to his work becomes simply ridiculous when reproduced in wood in minia-

ture by the cabinet-maker. How true this principle is so far as it applies to Gothic architecture we need hardly point out. Imagine a miniature church used for a cabinet all bristling with obtrusive points and aggressive angles. What better trap could be devised for catching the silken robes of the lady of the house, for tearing the coat of the master, and for scratching the delicate little hands of the children? A false adaptation of Gothic stone forms to wood carving will be found to be a common error in foreign furniture. Thus we have a wardrobe which would be more characteristic as an oratory, and a bookcase with arches that support nothing, and buttresses which have no thrusts to resist. Indeed it should be remembered that the arch is not a wooden but essentially a stone construction; it will be evident, on a moment's consideration, that it is a means of obtaining support by a number of separate small parts, the reverse of timber construction. It ought, therefore, to be well considered before being used in wood, wherein it should arise rather from coupled knees or brackets introduced to strengthen horizontal beams, than as an independent form.

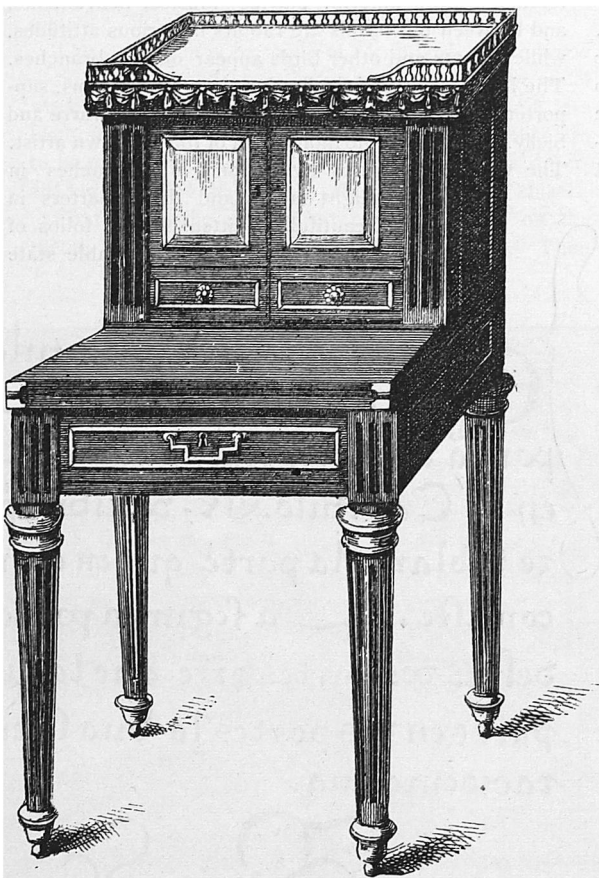
On the other hand, in our illustration of the Gothic *armoire* preserved in the Cathedral of Noyon, we have an example of how far the principles of architecture may be applied legitimately to furniture. The body has nothing architectural about it. It is wholly suited to its purposes. The doors are conveniently provided with folding leaves, and the wooden supports perform their office in a simple way, without pretending to be pillars or columns, as we should be sure to find them in an analogous connection in a similar work of the Renaissance. The "business part" of the cabinet—if we may be allowed to use the expression—is the joiner's work. It is only in the ornamental part, which is independent of the practical value of the article, that the designer has availed himself of the resources of the architect.

Almost the only trace of the architectural style in the beautiful Louis XVI. furniture is the fluting of the legs which gives them a certain resemblance to columns. Instead of being broader at the base, however, like columns, they are smaller, and terminate in a kind of muzzle, as may be seen in the accompanying illustration of a Marie Antoinette "bonheur du jour" (or "daily joy"), a kind of low table and cabinet combined. The fluting here appears also on the pilasters of the cabinet, and the little railing around the top is evidently of architectural origin. The general effect, however, is simple and good, the only objectionable feature being the imitation of festooned drapery.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF PICTURES AT HOME.

THE manner in which pictures may be distributed in the home to the best advantage is worthy of consideration; although we cannot approve of the "hard and fast" rules which some writers on the subject would lay down. The following suggestions, however, we think, by reason of the common-sense views they embody, will generally commend themselves to the average reader: "In dining-rooms, subjects of a cheerful, festive, and bacchanalian character become animating accessories, and the portraits of eminent, exalted persons, famous for their achievements in arms or their distinction in the arts, sciences, or literature, looking as it were out of their frames upon the company, may impart something agreeable by reminiscences of their great acquirements and good actions. Perhaps it would not be a great stretch of imagination to fancy them our companions participating in the hospitality of the table. Affectionate feelings will always determine that the portraits of dear relations, to be consonant to our reverence and esteem, should be placed where the mind is free from the trammels of ordinary life and its coarse realities, where reflection is undisturbed, and where the most pure and exalted sentiments of human nature can be indulged; in other words, the study and the library are the fittest shrines to contain their

portraits. In the drawing-room of course all works of art should bear the impress of its highest conceptions in elegance, purity, and cheerfulness. Pictures of human corpses, or bodily afflictions, martyrdoms, dying and suffering saints, anything lacerating



"BONHEUR DU JOUR" IN LOUIS XVI. STYLE.

the feelings, and occasioning painful emotions, should be strictly avoided here. They are only adapted to the public galleries as elucidating the triumph of the artist, either in expression, composition, or some other of the theoretical requirements of high art. All impure nudi-



GERMAN MEDIEVAL TEXTILE DESIGN.

ties are equally improper for the drawing-room. In the same category must be included some of the Dutch pictures existent, from their repulsive vulgarity or indecency. No work of art can be called an ornament to the drawing-room which a parent cannot contemplate in company with his daughters. Water-color

drawings may be reserved for the boudoir or an inner drawing-room, and also framed prints for sleeping apartments."

As a rule, no room in the house is so shabbily treated in the distribution of pictures as the bedroom. The refuse is considered good enough for this apartment. This is a mistake. If we have pictures there at all, they should be excellent as works of art, and the subject of the most agreeable character. For our own part, we think the fewer objects there are in the bedroom to arrest the attention of the occupant, the better it is for his repose and comfort. Who of us at times has not experienced the wearying effects of lying awake and being unable to take his eyes from the wall by reason of the fascination of some irritating picture or the aggressiveness in design of the wall-paper? But some of us perchance are never ill and never sleepless. For such, pictures in the bedroom are as desirable as in any other apartment; but it should be remembered that the true lover of art will not put his best paintings where his friends cannot enjoy them with him.

SUGGESTIONS FOR A DRAWING-ROOM.

THE description by an English writer, which we have recently come across, of a bright and pleasant drawing-room of modest pretensions may furnish some practical suggestions to our readers. The floors were stained and strongly varnished, so that they could be as easily washed as a tile pavement, and would not imbibe any dampness. A Persian carpet with a black ground was in the centre. Round the walls up to the height of the lock of the door was a framing of slightly chamfered wooden panels painted maroon, and behind it, kept close to the wall by the framing, was some thin Japanese or Indian matting, without pattern, of a dark cream color; by unscrewing the panelling it was easy at any time to change or turn the hangings. Above the panels, and reaching as high as the top of the door, was a broad band of handsome paper of full-toned color and pretty modern pattern. This band was finished at the top with a narrow shelf or cornice, on which were ranged a few decorative china plates and vases. Above the cornice the wall was either painted or papered of a pale gray-blue, and a few Japanese-looking birds had been cut out in paper and stuck on here and there, the whole effect being that of air and space above the height of one's head. Over the chimney-piece, which was handsome but not remarkable, was an ingenious arrangement, a real mantel-board. The owner of the house, who himself designed and carried out all the decorations, happened to know of a country church in which what is technically termed "restoration" was going on. Restoration in this case consisted chiefly in turning out a series of fine solid oak-panelled pews in favor of the orthodox stained deal "sittings" of modern Gothic. The panelling was of course sold at a moderate rate, and was, no doubt, for the most part converted into firewood, or applied to the use, as wain's cote or wagon sides, from which oak planking derives its usual name. One large piece was purchased and forms the chimney-board in the room described. It is about six feet wide by seven or eight high, magnificently framed with deeply cut mouldings, in the style of the last century. A cornice was added, partly to finish it at the top, partly to serve as a shelf. In the centre an oblong panel was filled with looking-glass. Two or three brackets were added at the sides, each supporting a little work of art, whether in china or ivory or bronze. The whole thing was suspended above the chimney-piece, so that it could be taken down and hung up again in another house if necessary. The door and other woodwork were painted in two shades of blue to harmonize with the paper, and there were some gold mouldings which looked well on the blue. It would not be easy in this country to "pick up" such a mantel-board, but otherwise the desirable features of this drawing-room could be readily adopted.